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HOMEMAKER'S CHAT Monday, July 31, 1939.

Subject: "MERRILY WE ROLL ALONG." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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"American life definitely includes the automobile," writes our Washington correspondent. "This is true whether people live on farms, in villages, or in cities. The desire to own something to roll along in seems to be universal, in all sections of the country, even at very low incomes. In this letter, I'm referring only to the portion of car expense required for strictly family purposes- such as taking trips, visiting friends, going shopping, and so on."

Automobile expenses were included in the large-scale Consumer-Purchases study made by the Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U. S. Department of Labor for the year 1935-1936. This study, you may remember, took in representative towns, villages and farming districts over practically the whole country. Five broad geographic regions were studied. Except for a special Negro study in the Southeast, only native white families were included in the survey, none of whom had been on relief during the year in which the facts were gathered. The families therefore represent a little better economic situation than would be found in the population as a whole. Almost 34,000 family expenditure schedules were analyzed by the Bureau of Home Economics, and our correspondent gives us some data from the preliminary reports on automobile expenditures, both for purchase and operation. She writes:

"Let's take the farm families first. In southern and central California, 971 out of every thousand families of white farm operators not on relief, had family cars. So did 965 out of every thousand similar families in Kansas and North Dakota, and 939 out of every thousand similar families in Michigan and Wisconsin, 938 in Illinois

and Iowa. In Oregon and Washington the percentage was also well over 90.

"In the east, families of New Jersey truck farmers had cars 881 times out of a thousand, although in Vermont the car ownership figure fell to 734 per thousand. And so it goes over the entire country, with the exception of the southeast, where the figures are not comparable with the rest of the country because of the system of tenure there.

"More used cars than new cars were bought by farm families during the year of the study, except in central and southern California.

"Now we'll look at the figures for villages. In 140 villages picked as representative, more than 60 percent of the native-white families studied reported car ownership. About 20 percent bought cars during the year of the survey (1935-1936.) More new cars than used cars were purchased in 3 of the 5 geographic regions studied. The highest percentage of car ownership in villages was in 24 communities on the Pacific Coast. That's a region of good roads, many parks, pleasure resorts, and recreational facilities. In many sections there is comparative scarcity of public conveyances. So it's easy to understand why 85 percent of these families reported owning automobiles.

"When we come to the small cities, new cars showed a slight lead over used car purchases in three out of four regions studied. On the Pacific Coast, 787 small city families out of each thousand reporting owned some kind of a car; in the Plains and Mountain region, 767 per thousand, and in the North Central area, 702. That's well over 70 percent of the small city families studied. Among white families in the Southeast region 63.5 percent had some sort of a car to ride in.

"The Consumer-Purchases study turned up some interesting facts on how much people use their cars the country over. Mileage is evidently a matter of cost. The more income, the more mileage. The trend is consistently upward from one income level to another. For example, in the North Central region, city families at the

lowest income level studied- under $500 a year- averaged about 2,000 miles. Those at the highest income level studied (from five to ten thousand dollars a year,) drove well over 10,000 miles in their cars. The range for village families was from 1,600 to slightly above 11,000. Farm families in this region averaged 2,000 miles when income was less than $250 a year, and covered about 8,500 miles annually when they had incomes of from five to ten thousand.

"Maybe your listeners would like to know what these same North Central families spent to operate their cars for strictly family use. In cities this cost averaged from $39 to $225 per car-owning family; in villages from $30 to $193; in farm counties, from $51 to $144. Gasoline constituted the largest item in this operating expense in each case, rising with mileage, which in turn, rose with income. Folks living in cities and villages spent more for oil than farm families, but tires and tubes used on country roads were higher expenses for rural families. The exact figures are all in the preliminary report, but I'll spare you some of the details.

"Repairs and service costs run fairly parallel for all three groups of car owners,- city, village and farm. They range from a minimum of $2 to a maximum of $21 according to the income level. Many car owners who have but little money are fairly good at keeping their own cars in repair without expense except for parts.

"Other expenses that took from $7 to $24 for automobile owners of all three groups at different income levels included garage rent, parking, licenses, personal property tax, fines, damages, tolls, accessories, and automobile association dues. Automobile insurance required from less than 50 cents a year to $31.

"If one looks at the same kinds of figures for some of the other regions, one finds the picture much the same."

That's all of this week's Washington letter. Before long, says our correspondent, she will have some clothing and other figures from the Consumer-Purchases study.

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